T&FN INTERVIEW

Christian Taylor

by Sieg Lindstrom

Would that a “down year” for any of us was only a dip like Christian Taylor’s ’13 season. The reigning World/Olympic triple jump champ managed “just” 4th in Moscow, but he still won the Diamond League and World Ranked No. 2.

Born in Georgia to Barbadian parents, Taylor hit a hot streak on the jumps runway—and track—almost from the moment he set soccer aside, figuring he’d grown too tall for it, early in high school. His soph season saw Taylor try summer competition for the first time; the next year (’07) he won the World Youth crown.

At Florida, four NCAA titles followed and in the summer of ’11 Taylor, already a world champion, the all-time fifth-longest jumper and the youngest man ever to 3-bounce so far, turned pro and set his sights successfully on Olympic hardware.

After his London triumph, Taylor followed mentor Rana Reider to Loughborough, England, when Reider took a coaching job with Britain’s national team.

Taylor’s girlfriend, Olympics-aspiring volleyball player Kelly Murphy who plays professionally in Italy, provides a sounding board, mostly over Skype, for the trading of cultural adjustment stories.

T&FN, too, took to a digital connection to ask Taylor what’s on tap for this year.

T&FN: How’s life treating you over in England? Taylor: It’s pretty cool. Training’s going well; just training, that’s all.

T&FN: You’re obviously not competing indoors this year.

Taylor: Yeah. I’m really trying to focus on some 400s this year and I’m going to open up at Florida Relays, actually, but I’d like to qualify for USA’s in the 400 and just try something new because it’s kind of an off year. So I figured, “Why not dust some of that dust off and go have some fun?”

T&FN: Exploring a different event will probably recharge your batteries somewhat.

Taylor: Yeah, exactly. It presents some new challenges, and it’s been a little rollercoaster the last three years: straight shot out with some quick success and then a little disappointment in Moscow so it’s kind of a step away. I’m done beating myself up and the whole mentality is to just go out there, have some fun and find the old Christian again.

T&FN: Will you long and triple jump as well?

Taylor: My first couple meets will be 400s and I’ve spoken to the Drake Relays director and based off that will determine if that gets me into the Drake [400].

So there’s definitely some meets where I’m going to be running 400s but also outside of that I have to get the total Diamond League triple jump win because they IAAF has that rule where you get a bye into the next World Championships if you win that.

It is going to be important for me to get that bye since I didn’t win in Moscow. That will help me reestablish myself and get back on the triple jump.

T&FN: If things go well in the 400—and we’re not forgetting you ran 45.34 as a fresh at Florida—would you consider vying for a spot on the U.S. 4x4 at the new World Relays in May?

Taylor: Absolutely. I really think that after the U.S. got 2nd behind the Bahamas at the Olympics, that really kind of opened the window for other people to get on that relay. I think there’s the possibility that they could use a leg or could be looking for an alternate.

For me, I know what I need to run; hitting a standard is important, but being consistent is also important. They want to know that somebody can do the rounds or could be the final guy, whatever they need. It’s something I think would be really cool and who doesn’t want to go to the Bahamas?

T&FN: How will running the 400 change up your training compared to the past 3 years?

Taylor: I definitely have been running a lot more. Before I would be jumping 2 or 3 times a week, whether it was long or triple. There’s that constant

Taylor in a Nutshell

• Personal: Christian Devere
  Taylor was born June 18, 1990, in Fayetteville, Georgia; 6-2/175 (1.88/80)
  • PRs: 100 — 10.61 (’12); 200 — 20.70 (’13); 400 — 45.34 (’09); LJ — 26-10½ (’10); TJ — 58-11¼ (2011) (5, x W; 3, 4 A)
  • Schools: Sandy Creek (Tyrone, Georgia) HS ’08; Florida ’12; now represents Li Na
  • Coaches: Eric Bowen (Sandy Creek); Mike Holloway & Dick Booth (Florida); Rana Reider (professional)
  • Major Meets:
    LJ — 3)WJ ’07; 3)USJ ’07, 7)WJ ’08; 6)NCi ’09; 2)NC, 4)NC, 1)OT ’12; 6)US ’13
    TJ — 4)USJ, 1)WJ ’07; 2)USJ, 8)WJ ’08; 1)NC, 4)NC ’09; 1)NCi ’10; 2)USi ’10; 1)NC, 1)US ’11; 2)USi ’12; 2)WCi ’13; 1)OT ’12; 1)OG ’13; 4)WC ’13
  • World/U.S. Rankings:
    LJ — x, 6 ’10; x, 7 ’11; x, 5 ’12; x, 8 ’13; TJ — x, 4 ’09; x, 1 ’10; 1, 1 ’11; 1, 1 ’12; 2, 1 ’13

14 — April 2014
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Taylor — continued

where you missed a stroke you’ll never be able
to hit the ball. You have to hit it and be done
with it and prepare for the next shot.

T&FN: Are you trying anything new and
different with your technique here in the off year?
Taylor: I’m actually mak-
ing a big change. I’m switch-
ing my takeoff leg. That’s
going to surprise some
people. I tried it in Brussels
at the last Diamond League
of last year and went 16.89
[55-5] off of it.

I actually surprised my-
self. The commentators
were surprised that I was so
happy with that distance but
they didn’t realize that was
the first time I’d jumped off
the opposite leg.

My coach and I looked
at some film and we’ve seen
that the other leg was doing
things that could actually
take me farther. Why not
go for that?

If there’s a 1% chance
that it could happen, we’re
jumpers, we work in centi-
meters. It doesn’t take feet
to get to that World Record.
I don’t take “I’m willing to
do whatever it takes” as a
joke. I don’t take that lightly.

When I talked to my
coach and he heard it he
was supportive but he also
asked, “Do you really want
to risk that?”

The thing is if it takes
getting used to, if it takes
a little time to build up to,
I’m going to do it for the
long-run goal.

T&FN: Did you try it in Brussels with a full
approach?
Taylor: Yup. I literally just winged it. If
you see the videos you will definitely see that
it was not a comfortable thing. When you’re
jumping you just have to go for it, and the
thing is I would run-run-run and when I came
to the board every time I would say, “What
am I doing?”

You can’t hesitate and that was costing me.
I’m not saying every jump was 16.89. The first
one was 16.40 [55-9 ¼] but then once I realized I
could do it I said, “Let me go for a little more,”
and obviously it increased.

Now I have to go with the mindset that it’s
not my opposite leg; I didn’t switch legs, it’s
just jumping.

I kind of think I have gotten over the bar-
rier of the fact that I have switched, and to be
honest that’s kind of the reason that I didn’t
do indoors, because I didn’t think it was worth
messing up the training and messing up the
transition that we’re doing right now.

T&FN: So what’s your pattern now?
Taylor: I jump right–right–left. Before I was
doing left–left–right. My last leg was what they
would call the weak leg but now I’m doing
right–right–left and my last leg would actually
be my long jump leg.

I was doing long jump–long jump, the
powerful leg, and then using whatever I have
left on the last jump. Now I’m going to save
that last big long jump for the long jump phase.

T&FN: You’ve certainly watched video of
Jonathan Edwards’ World Record (60-¼/18.29)
and his other big jump (59-7/18.16) at the ’95 World
Championships—even though you were 5 at the
time. He looked like a stone skipping on water. Is
that what you aim for?
Taylor: Yes, as close as possible. Obviously
what he did is truly one of a kind. It’s almost
dezerting when you see it. The first time I
saw it I thought, “That’s impossible.” It looks
just unreal for somebody so skinny to be so
springy, so quick. It just looks so easy.

It’s almost something I watch almost on
a daily basis. That’s what you want to strive
for and then be able to see how you can put a
twist to go past that mark.

It’s just such an amazing feat and I have just
so much respect for the man and the perfor-
ance, but it’s something I think I’ve found a
new hunger for. It’s something that needs to
be broken. It’s been over 20 years now.